

ABSTRACT

Exploring power manifestations within police and civilian discourses: A study of labelling, stigmatizing and stereotyping in a ‘hotspot’ community in northern Trinidad

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The study describes power manifestations in the discourses of police officers and civilian from a specific ‘hotspot’ community in northern Trinidad and Tobago. It draws on multidisciplinary knowledge frameworks to assist in the description and explanation of labels, stigmas and stereotypes evidenced in discourses produced by the study participants/informants. A poststructural, qualitative approach was taken towards the exploration of power manifestations. Emergent meaning construction strategies were used to develop discussions, definitions and descriptions of power with the aim of providing an explanation relevant to the context of police and civilian interaction within a specific context – suburban, low income, labelled, high crime communities in a developing country. Data for the study was collected from interviews and recorded footage of police/civilian interaction within one of the ‘hotspot communities’ in Trinidad and Tobago. The study resulted in the identification of labels, stigmas and stereotypes reflective of the power of language to define or characterize social actors, organizations and interactive practices, while also demonstrating how power discourses are used to position and shift social actors during interaction. The study revealed a masking and endorsement of language misinterpretation informing and resulting from police and civilian interaction at the community level. It showed how power discourses are used to accomplish and justify meaningful constructions of interactive domains and how these discourses adopt a meaning beyond the point of their authoring and become imbued with an existence that hinders individuals’ ability to conceive them as constructs authored to function within a specific context.

Keywords: power; labelling; stigmatizing; stereotyping; police and civilian discourses; hotspot community.